MUSEUM ON MAIN STREET
A Museum Of County Life

IMPRESSIONS

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER • MARCH 2001

OFFICERS

PRESIDENT
Pauline V. Walters

IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT
Susan Cee Wineberg

VICE PRESIDENT
Virginia Hills

TREASURER
Patricia W. Creal

RECORDING SECRETARY
Judith Chrisman

CORRESPONDING SECRETARY

DIRECTORS

Rosemarion Blake
Nancy Bryk
Ann DeFreytas
Julie Creal Goodridge
Peggy Haines
Pamela Newhouse
Karen K. O'Neal
Peter Rocco
Karen Simpson
Jay Snyder
Patricia E. Thompson
Esther Warzynski

DIRECTORS-AT-LARGE

Ralph P. Beebe
Tom Freeman
Scott Jacob

INFORMATION

Published Seven Times A Year
From September-May.
Susan Cee Wineberg, Editor
swines@umich.edu

Museum On Main Street
500 N. Main Street at Beakes Street
Post Office Box 3336
Ann Arbor, Mich. 48106-3336

Phone: 734.662.9092
Fax 734.663.0039
Email: WCHS MoMS@aol.com

Web Site: www.hvcn.org/info/gswc/society/socwashtenaw.htm

THE LETTERS OF WASHTENAW COUNTY PIONEER JOHN GEDDES 1825-1844

Dear Brother

On Sunday, February 18th, a standing-room-only crowd of almost 90 people filled the Bentley Library to hear Dr. Russell Bidlack, Dean Emeritus of the School of Library Science of the University of Michigan and local historian ***par excellence,*** *speak on the Geddes family and the letters they exchanged in the earliest decades of Washtenaw settlement.*

From the collection of Russell Bidlack.

John Geddes and Salesman in front of Geddes house on Huron River Drive, *ca.* 1880.

Washtenaw historians have been long familiar with articles penned by John Geddes in the 1870s and 1880s recounting his pioneer memories of people who shaped our County's beginnings. Called "Uncle John" in his old age, he is remembered also for his leading a call in 1857 to organize the Washtenaw Historical Society and his role in the Society's reorganization in 1873 as the Pioneer Society of the County of Washtenaw. It was this later organization with annual dues initially at twenty-five cents that led to the publication of the massive 1881 **History of Washtenaw County** which remains a principal source for local history [portraits of John and his brother, Robert, can be found in this history]. The Pioneer Society was the predecessor of today's Washtenaw County Historical Society, and the dream of Uncle John Geddes of an historical museum now has been realized in our Museum on Main Street.

John was one of three brothers who came to Washtenaw County. Geddes Road, Geddes School, and Geddes Pond have helped to perpetuate the Geddes family's memory, as has the community known as Geddes (or Geddesburg) at which, for many years, there was a station on the Michigan Central Railroad and, for a brief period, had its own post office. Even in recent years, we have the housing development called Geddes Lakes. At today's Huron River Drive and Dixboro Road, can be found the still-occupied home that John Geddes built in 1837 with lumber sawed by himself in the Geddes Sawmill on the Huron.

In a letter to the editor of Ann Arbor's *Peninsular Courier* dated April 8, 1870, John recalled his first view of Ann Arbor on his arrival on July 15, 1824, just five months following the town's founders:

Ann Arbor then had one house, a sort of frame, one story high. There was an additional log house, one story and a half high, no rafters nor roof on it. There was a tent north of the house. John Allen was putting up in the tent. Elisha W. Rumsey and wife occupied the house and entertained persons who came viewing land.

While grateful for John Geddes' recorded memories, local historians have wished that his contemporary accounts known to have been written to family back in Pennsylvania might have been preserved. But no Geddes letter was known to exist until the spring of 1999 when a letter to our Historical Society arrived from a manuscript and postal history dealer named Stuart Goldman, in Canton, Massachusetts. He wrote of having purchased a large collection of

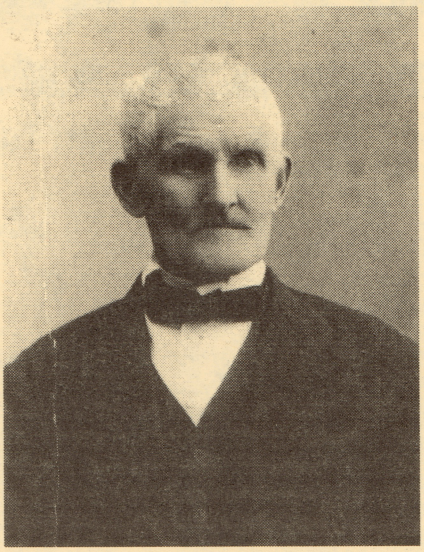
March Program

Peggy Haines, Washtenaw County Clerk and Register of Deeds, will give us a tour of the new County Annex Building at 200 N. Main St. and talk about the election process. This will be held Sunday March 18th at 2 PM at the Annex.

old letters and papers found in an abandoned house in Groton, Massachusetts, pertaining to the Geddes family, including early correspondence between John and his brother, William Geddes. "I would like to get a historical perspective as to what I have," he wrote. Susan Wineberg, then president of the Society, responded, as did Ina Hanel of the Washtenaw County Historical District Commission. While recognizing the value of such a collection to local historians, Goldman expected to sell its contents to individual postal history collectors, for whom letters mailed during a state's territorial period have particular interest. Michigan did not become a state, of course, until 1837. It is also important to remember that postage stamps were not introduced in the U.S. until 1847, and that their use did not become general much before the Civil War. Furthermore, envelopes were rarely used before the introduction of stamps. Before then, letters were carefully folded in a standard manner and secured with sealing wax, leaving a blank portion for the address and for the local postmaster to record the name of his post office and the date posted. He also wrote the amount of postage, depending upon distance, to be collected from the recipient. Rarely did the sender pay the postage in those days. Thus, the postal history of a letter, before envelopes were used, became part of the letter itself, and, because of its uniqueness, collectors are usually reluctant to permit photocopying.

Therefore, Mr. Goldman quite logically refused to consider xeroxing the John Geddes letters for the benefit of Washtenaw County historians. "That would decrease their value," was his response to such a query from Susan Wineberg.

Thanks to Ms. Wineberg, I learned of this local history treasure, and because Mr. Goldman agreed that the collection was special in this regard, he and I were able to negotiate a private purchase, though at first he wanted $20,000! At a future date, this collection, containing hundreds of letters and documents pertaining to the Geddes family, besides the letters of John, will be placed in the Bentley Historical Library. It is apparent that this collection was gathered and preserved by a granddaughter of John Geddes named



John Geddes, *ca.* 1880. From the collection of Russell Bidlack. Note tattered collar.

Charlotte Randall of Beloit, Wisconsin. How it migrated to Groton, Massachusetts, remains a mystery.

In the collection, there are nearly seventy letters written by William Geddes in Pennsylvania to John Geddes in Washtenaw County between 1825 and 1844. It was in 1844 that William moved with his family to a farm in Pittsfield Township, thus making letter writing between the brothers unnecessary. Although a similar number are known to have been written by John to William, because William regularly noted in his letters the dates on which John's letters were received, regretfully, only forty-one of John's letters to William are in the collection. We know, for instance, that John had written home on May 30, 1825, just two weeks following his and his brother Robert's arrival in Ann Arbor Township. This letter is not in the collection, nor are nine others written by John that William noted receiving prior to 1828. Whether William had neglected to save these, along with later ones that are missing, or whether these may have been given to other family members as mementos, or sold, possibly to postal history collectors, we do not know. We can only hope that they may still exist somewhere. We can be grateful, however, that these forty-one are now back in Washtenaw County where John wrote them, often by candle light, along with a number that he wrote to family members in his old age. We must also be grateful that Charlotte Randall, John's granddaughter, born in 1865, managed somehow to bring together and preserve the huge collection of Geddes family papers, of which John's letters, along with William's, are but a small part.

A great-granddaughter of William Geddes, Hannah Wright of Jackson, Michigan, has discovered another treasure of family records in William's old trunk, which she is generously sharing. This writer must also express gratitude to Sally Silvennoinen, great-granddaughter of Francis Monaghan to whom John Geddes sold his farm on the Huron in 1885. Sally and her husband live in the house that John built in 1837 and occupied with his family for half a century. Sally has provided research and transcription assistance that has proven to be invaluable.

My purpose today is to share with you a sampling of the contents of this collection, but first a few words about John Geddes leading up to his coming to Washtenaw County. A member of the fourth generation of American descendants of a Scotch-Irish immigrant of 1752, John was born some 200 years ago, on March 19, 1801. He was the second son of a once prosperous farmer in Londonderry Township, Lebanon County, Pennsylvania, about fifteen miles from Harrisburg. Although John stated that his formal schooling had ended at age fourteen, his father owned what was then considered an extensive library, and John's letters suggest that he, like his younger brother, William, had read extensively among their father's books.

His father, under the custom of primogeniture, had favored John's older brother, Robert Geddes, Jr., born in 1797, who would also become a Washtenaw pioneer. As the eldest son, he had received a 200-acre farm near Romulus, New York, from his father. John and William might have received similar paternal gifts had their father not become involved in some devastating lawsuits. Aggravated by the ill-tempered demands of his second wife, the elder Robert Geddes had sought comfort in the barrel of whiskey that he kept replenished in his cellar.

John's mother had died in 1808 when he was seven years old, and his relationship with his stepmother being an unhappy one, he nevertheless remained

at home to assist his father until 1824. Now 23-years-old, he resolved to seek anew life in the west, having learned that virgin land could be purchased in Michigan Territory from the U.S. Government for only $1.25 an acre. With the wages his father had paid him, plus a loan of $45.00, he would have enough to buy a quarter section (160 acres) of land should he find a tract to his liking. Stopping in Romulus, New York, to consult with his bachelor brother, John proceeded on foot with an older man, also going west, named William P. Stevens. Together they went to Buffalo and across Lake Erie to Detroit in the steamship *Superior,* each paying $6.00 steerage rate.

John's first Michigan meal was at Mrs. McMillan's boarding house in Detroit for which he paid 12 1/2 cents. He and Stevens then

... called on Mr. Kearsley, the Receiver [for public lands] and he recommended Washtenaw County as the most favorable place to locate, and we started in that direction, and arrived at Johnson's Tavern on the Rouge, where Wayne village now is, and stopped for the night.

On the following day, John and his companion walked from Johnson's Tavern to Woodruff's Grove, Washtenaw County's first settlement. Here they met a man name Robert Fleming who accompanied them the next day along the north side of the Huron River to where, a year earlier, he had purchased a tract of land through which flowed a creek that Fleming had named for himself. There Fleming was building Washtenaw's first sawmill. John Geddes recalled this incident vividly in a letter to the editor of Ann Arbor's weekly ***Peninsular Courier*** in 1870, for it would be at Fleming's mill that John would learn the trade of milling.

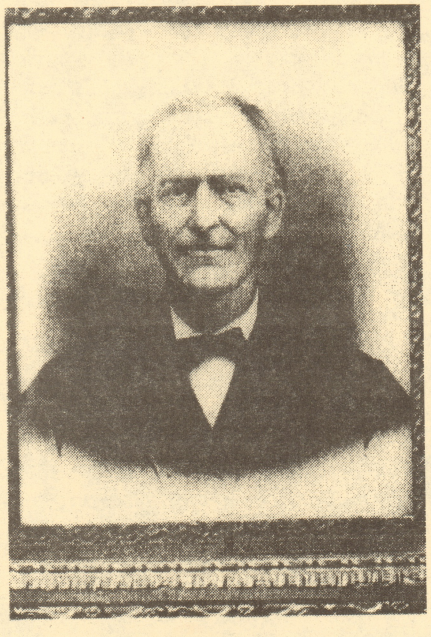
We passed on and came to where Orin White and his family were living, about two miles west of the sawmill. We forded the Huron River near where the Monroe bridge now is. We arrived in Ann Arbor before night [July 15, 1824].

Liking what he saw in Washtenaw County and recalling the prediction of his famous uncle James Geddes, the chief engineer for the Erie Canal, that with the canal's completion in 1825, there would be a mighty rush of settlers and land speculators to buy Michigan land, John selected the southwest quarter of Section 8 of what would later be called Pittsfield Township. Later John sold this for a profit; today it is part of the Ann Arbor Municipal Airport at State and Ellsworth Road. Homeward bound, John stopped at the Detroit Land Office on July 21, 1824, to pay $200 for his first investment in Michigan land.

Going first to Romulus, New York, to report his observations to his brother, John convinced Robert to sell his farm and join him on his return to Michigan Territory the following spring. Robert did so, receiving $2,400 cash for his land.

Among the hundreds of items in the Geddes collection are several autobiographical items penned by John Geddes at different times during his long life. The last is dated June 7, 1888. In one of these he recalled his and Robert's arrival in Ann Arbor Township after a journey of three weeks in "an open wagon."

April 19th, 1825, my brother Robert and myself started from our old home for Michigan via Romulus, New York. We arrived in Ann Arbor May 11th, 1825. After buying what lands we could pay for, with leaving a sufficient amount to meet necessary expenses, we moved on to the South part of the North West fractional quarter, section 36, Ann Arbor, Township, June 14th 1825... adjoining the Huron River on the North; oak openings, some trees. No shelter, we had a wagon with no cover over it. The first thing we done was to cut down an Elm tree and strip the bark off and place the bark over the wagon. I went 1 ½ miles for fire across lots, no roads, through the woods. We next tried to plough with a Wood's Patent plow, but there was no go. The sod was too tough. At the same time we knew how to plough. Next day I started for Detroit (33 miles) [walking] bought a bull share and carried it to Springwells where I overtook a man and a yoke of oxen. He agreed to bring the share... in his wagon and I passed on.



William Geddes
Born: 1802, Lebanon County, Pennsylvania
Died: May 21, 1877, at home on the family farm near Ann Arbor, Michigan

Portrait of William Geddes, from the collection of Russell Bidlack

My brother commenced building a shanty after I was gone. The land was oak openings, with much grass and few trees. It's a great grass farm to day. In due time the Bull-plow was made, and my brother hired Josiah P. Turner, who had a yoke of Oxen, for $1.50 a day for him and his oxen. My brother had three yoke, they cost him 150 dollars. The four yoke of oxen were hitched to the plow. It was a strong team and done some first rate plowing, 15 ¾ acres was ploughed, it yielded 15 bu. wheat to the acre. The next year the same land yielded 25 bu. to the acre. My brother Robert died March 11, 1866, age 68 ¼ years. I still reside on the said same description of land mentioned above. I attended sawmill one year on Sec. 25, Fleming Creek and 39 years on the Huron, sec. 36. I quit March 1868 sawing.

In the biographical sketch of Robert Geddes included in the 1881 ***History of Washtenaw County***, doubtless written by John, it is stated that the brothers lived in the shanty, which measured only ten feet square, for two years. For the first year, perhaps longer, Robert and John worked together as farmers, but at some point John began working for $11.00 per month at Fleming's sawmill. This proved to be a fortuitous learning experience for John in his future career as a miller. He learned how not to construct a sawmill. He recalled later:

The sawmill was not a profitable investment for him [Robert Fleming]. It was a cheap built affair. The irons were poor, the frame was poor, and the mill

Photo by Susan Wineberg

Russell Bidlack speaking at the Observatory.

dam was poor. It soon got out of repair.

In the winter of 1826-27, with John's assistance and with lumber from the ill-functioning Fleming sawmill, Robert Geddes decided to build a proper house. Weary of doing their own housework after nearly two years in their shanty, the brothers were also aware that their sister, Jane, longed to escape the dominance of her stepmother; they invited her to join them in Michigan with the promise of a proper house in which to live. Jane, now nearly 23 years of age, accepted their invitation. While aware of the primitive living standard she would experience, she may have hoped, nevertheless, that her marriage prospects might improve in Michigan Territory.

No young lady in those days could make such a journey alone, of course, so John returned to Lebanon County in the summer of 1827 to fetch her. Frugal by nature, John remembered four years later in a letter to William:

The stage is an expensive way. It cost Jane and me 54 dollars to come from home to Washtenaw and I walked from Meadville to Erie, and from Detroit here.

John's failure to write back home promptly to tell of their safe arrival in Washtenaw County brought censure by William in his letter of November 27, 1827

Dear Brother. I received your letter of the 20th of August on the third of September, the arrival of which was considered late enough by myself and quite too late by father... [who] called at the post office week after week until a letter arrived.

It is in a letter to his father dated May 11, 1829, that John related interesting details regarding the construction of Robert's house which, although since much remodeled, is still occupied at 70 S. Dixboro Road.

... when Jane came on, there was a floor of loose boards laid jointed with the axe, above and below. The shanty was made use of as a kitchen. The chimney was built about the first of November [1826] in the house of brick, 4 dollars pr. thousand... The windows and door for the room next the chimney (the lower room) were put in about the middle of December. The house had been chinked when Jane came. After the windows were in, it was plastered inside in the seams between the logs. The house was tolerable comfortable then. In cold and stormy weather it was very disagreeable before; too much so for Jane, who still hoped for the better and never said she wished she had never left Pa., so much to her credit. No other part of the house was plastered but the sitting room; the remaining part merely chinked. The beds were all in the other parts of the house up stairs; we made use of feathers to sleep under in the winter.

Jane slept in the room over the sitting room... Robert and me and the hands slept in the other room. The house remained stationary from Dec. 1827 until the first of March last [1829] owing to not sawing lumber suitable when we had Flemings saw-mill. We had no other kinds of timber than oak, which was thought would barely answer. In the spring of 1828 we hauled some white ash logs and had them sawed for flooring, calculating to lay the floors in the fall...

The house now [1829] has the two outside doors and an inside door made and cased. They are all panel doors. The floor in the entry and two rooms laid; the windows in and cased belonging to these two rooms. The mantle piece made, a dresser in the room and a cupboard in the side of the chimney. This is about all that is done. The stair case and stairs are made. Robert intends to fix out the other part of the house this summer in some style or other. He likewise intends to plaster the room we live in, or the sitting room which it may be called.

With a parting gift from her father's limited resources, Jane had been able to purchase 160 acres of Government land on July 13, 1827, near that owned by Robert. She kept house for her brothers until her marriage, in April 1829, to a wealthy widower named Alvah Ewers, her land constituting a bit of dowry. Soon, thereafter, they moved to Detroit where "Mr. Ewers," as his brothers-in-law deferentially called him, operated a prosperous cooperage business.

Curiously, Robert Geddes was married only nine days following his sister Jane's wedding. Whether news of his courtship leading up to this event had been shared with William in one of John's missing letters cannot be known, nor whether Jane felt some pressure to marry, herself, and to vacate Robert's house to make room for a wife. John's report of Robert's marriage is contained in his letter to his father of May 11, 1829:

Robert was married on the seventh of May to a Miss Maria Louisa Lane, formerly of Broome County, NY. She came into Ann Arbour (sic) in September 1827... since when she has kept house for her brother... She was twenty-five... according to her own account. She is said to be a lady of more than common intellect, and corresponding energy. Robert brings her home tomorrow... Jane leaves this establishment the same day.

It had been Robert's plan to build a barn in 1829, but this was put off as John explained in a letter to William on August 17, 1829:

Robert has not built a barn yet, and I think will not this summer: Matrimony is an era in a person's life, and building a barn is another. Two eras in one year is scarcely to be expected.

It had been three years prior to Robert's wedding that he sold to John for $150.00 a half-interest in the 82.40 acres (the south half of the NW ¼ of Section 36) that he had purchased in 1825. It would not be until after Robert's death in 1866 that John would purchase from Robert's heirs the other "undivided half."

While Robert Fleming's sawmill had been a financial failure because of its poor construction, there could be no doubt that, with the constant influx of settlers and the ample availability of trees in Washtenaw County, saw-milling could be a profitable enterprise. Furthermore, unlike Fleming Creek, the Huron River, as was proven by other recently completed sawmills, could be harnessed to provide ample sawing power with a properly constructed dam. So it was that Robert and John had agreed to form a milling partnership, Robert providing the capital,

including payment to laborers, while John would contribute his full time directing and working on the structure. Once completed, with Robert as owner, he would pay John $14.00 per month for doing the sawing, and they would divide the profits.

For the most part, settlers would haul the logs to the mill by sleds on the winter snow, receiving half of the resulting lumber. In a letter from William Geddes dated February 25, 1828, in response to one from John that is missing, we learn indirectly that Robert had purchased the Fleming Creek mill for its usable parts. (Many years later the Fleming Creek site would become that of Parker Mill, an historic structure that has been restored in operating condition). Robert and John were also dreaming, in 1828, of someday adding a gristmill to their operation—a dream that would never be fulfilled. William wrote on February 25, 1828, to John:

It was fortunate that you engaged in that business when you did for now you have acquired much information in the business, and are in possession of a greater portion of means and materials for the erection of a mill of your own... and you have acquired these means and materials with far less cost and labour than otherwise could have done.

The time would come, in 1847, when John would purchase from Robert for $400.00 the "Saw Mill Property," which included the mill yard.

The earliest extant letter from John to William in the Geddes Collection is dated November 18, 1828, and relates in considerable detail the slow progress of the sawmill's construction."...Our dam takes much more time than we supposed it would...there is not less than four hundred ton of stone in it," John reported. There was also the fact that Robert's land lay only on the south side of the Huron while a dam must be anchored on both sides of a river. Fortunately, Elnathan Botsford, who owned the land on the north side, was a cooperative neighbor—he cheerfully agreed to sell to Robert a stretch of his river bank for $100. A small lot of 40 acres adjoining Botsford, however, was owned by a Baptist preacher named Moses Clark whom John judged not to be a follower of the "Prince of Peace" in ordinary affairs. He was "rascally, unmerciful, and unmanly," in John's words. Clark actually had reason for concern, however, for the mill pond that would form behind the Geddes dam could "well overflow" a portion of Clark's little farm. He threatened to take the Geddes brothers to court, and on at least one occasion they paid him $20.00 for his professed damages. Because of the deaths of three of his children, however, the Rev. Mr. Clark soon moved away after selling his forty acres to Botsford. Clark's misfortunes thus solved a nagging problem for the Geddes brothers.

An entire lecture could be gleaned from John's letters devoted to the construction and operation of a 19th century sawmill in Michigan, but there are more interesting topics worthy of mention here. There are two bits of local history pertaining to John's lumber worthy of quoting here. From his letter of December 28, 1833, we learn:

Our sawing this year will amount to a little over 330,000 feet from nearly 1,100 logs. We furnish the oak lumber for the Court House in Ann Arbour, 26,000 feet at $5 per thousand. The Court House is to be built of bricks.

Then from his letter of April 17, 1839:

The University is not to be built this summer, but there is to be four dwelling houses to be built for head men... the houses are to be brick and roofed with tin. They were let at $7,000 a House. I am to deliver them 30,000 feet of oak lumber at Ann Arbor for $10.50 pr. Thousand. I have agreed with two men to haul it for $2.50 pr. thousand. The distance is four miles. A man with two horses and wagon charges $1.50 pr. load for hauling, from this to the Village of Ann Arbor, two loads pr. day, 500 feet of inch oak is a good load.

Thus, oak lumber sawed by John Geddes yet survives in the U.M. President's House, the only one of these four houses still standing. John Geddes especially sought sales of this nature because payment would be made in specie, not bank notes which were often discounted when traded.

The Geddes letters could be the source for essays on a variety of topics other than sawmilling, including John's involvement with politics, religion, and the building of the railroad between Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor for which John provided many of the ties.

Because a family member receiving a letter, for which he had to pay twenty-five cents in postage, wanted his money's worth, both John and William usually wrote extremely long letters in which they often included what at the time doubtless seemed of only passing interest, but this is the stuff from which social history is made.

John was an early convert to a political cause of his day, the Anti-Masonic Party that grew out of a mysterious murder involving a New York printer accused of revealing secrets of the Order of Freemasonry. Concerned that his brother did not condemn the Masons with his own fervor, John was tireless in

Collection of Russell Bidlack.

Geddes School *ca.* 1923.

his arguments. The movement died after a few years and John became a reluctant Whig.

John was not deeply religious during his early years in Washtenaw County. In a letter to William of August 17, 1829, he admitted that:

I go to meeting rather oftener than one Sunday in three; two in five would be near enough; Presbyterian meeting generally, occasionally to Methodist and Episcopal. We have a variety of Religious meetings. The Presbyterians are the most numerous sect and the Aristocracy of the Land... Robert don't go to meeting as I do, reads more and sleeps some, writes little or none, he has not wrote a letter this two years.

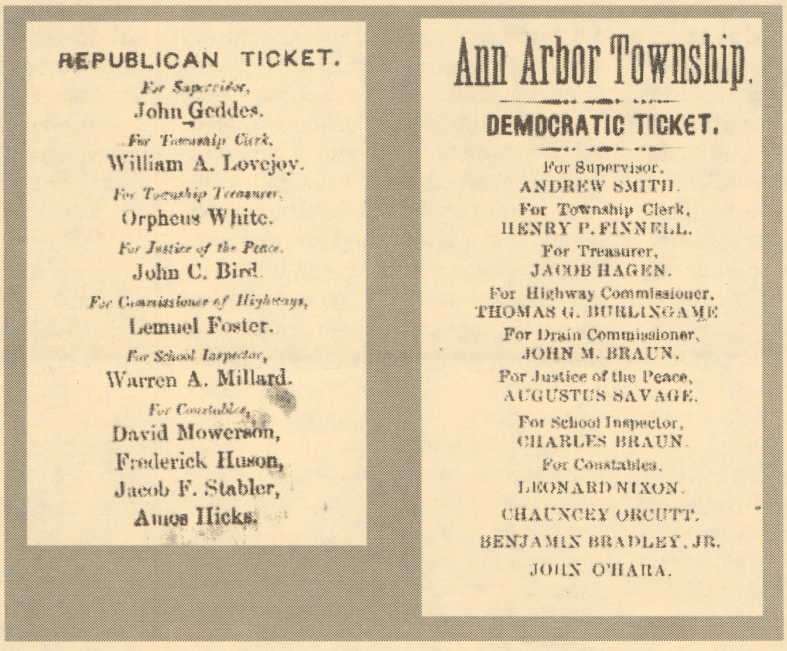
John later joined a Presbyterian group in Ypsilanti and, in its construction of its church, he provided a considerable amount of lumber, and before long he became an Elder. William was not impressed as John detailed his financial support of religion.

Among the most interesting observations found in John's letters are those pertaining to the mores and customs of the time. In his letter of March 8, 1830, John noted that "Temperance Societies have found their way to Michigan," there being one in both Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti. Though he reported that neither he nor Robert had joined either society, they recognized that "ardent spirits is a useless expense," adding:

Robert furnished no ardent spirits last hay making and harvest, neither in the field nor in the house, but he intends to furnish plenty when he raises his barn. A barn was raised last summer about three miles from us without whiskey, the first trial of its kind. We were both there, some would do but little, being offended at the new regulations... The obstinacy of the contrary persons occasioned very hard lifting for them that would work, and I thought for once in my life the disuse of ardent spirits was a damage to me. Another barn has been raised in the Cold Water plan and has done well. Whiskey is 37 ½ [cents] pr. gallon.

In a letter of March 10, 1832, John described a wedding in Robert's house:

We had a wedding here the 23rd of Feb. Mariah's sister Luna to a Mr. Lyon. They are both Methodists and the ceremony was performed by a Methodist minister. The young folks of the neighborhood were invited in, which made considerable of a party. But they were not very sociable, being ignorant of the way to enjoy themselves... Young people meet in numbers so seldom in the country that they wanted a leader in those things... If I wish to become acquainted after an introduction (if that is necessary) I attend conversation, as Yankee girls are famed for words... These romping plays, I take little or no pleasure in them, and the kidding plays are unfashionable and I am not sorry for the loss of them. Many of the ladies here play whist, a game of cards. When I first noticed it, I thought it an Idle Business: but it was not long until I took hold and learnt to play a good hand, but as I am now a Presbyterian I have quit playing. Uncle James in the letter I received from him informs me that he thinks it high time for me to lay aside being Bachelor any longer. I still console myself that I can live a bachelor if I can't suit myself in a partner. It is not the sack (the mitten it is termed here) I am afraid of; I have lost that fear. It is indifference that keeps me a Bachelor. (It appears that 'the Mitten' referred to becoming engaged).



REPUBLICAN TICKET.

For Supervisor,
John Geddes.
For Township Clerk,
William A. Lovejoy.
For Township Treasurer,
Orpheus White.
For Justice of the Peace,
John C. Bird.
For Commissioner of Highways,
Lemuel Foster.
For School Inspector,
Warren A. Millard.
For Constables,
David Mowerson,
Frederick Huson,
Jacob F. Stabler,
Amos Hicks.

Ann Arbor Township.

DEMOCRATIC TICKET.

For Supervisor,
ANDREW SMITH.
For Township Clerk,
HENRY P. FINNELL.
For Treasurer,
JACOB HAGEN.
For Highway Commissioner,
THOMAS G. BURLINGAME
For Drain Commissioner,
JOHN M. BRAUN.
For Justice of the Peace,
AUGUSTUS SAVAGE.
For School Inspector,
CHARLES BRAUN.
For Constables,
LEONARD NIXON.
CHAUNCEY ORCUTT.
BENJAMIN BRADLEY, JR.
JOHN O'HARA.

Ballots for casting votes in the 1840s.

John and William kept each other informed regarding the weather in their respective locations. John had purchased a thermometer soon after coming to Michigan with which he carefully recorded its daily readings. Each brother also detailed for the other the fluctuating prices of goods and services in their communities.

A subject of constant concern expressed in the brothers' correspondence was the state of their own and family members' health. They were writing at a time when the germ theory was not even imagined, of course, and when bleeding, purging, leeches, and medicines that now may be considered poisonous, including ingestion of mercury, were the doctors' common answers to most illnesses. Knowing today how the dreaded disease called consumption (tuberculosis) is spread, and aware of the crowding in Robert's four-room house that not only sheltered Robert, Maria, and their infant daughter, as well as John, but also varying numbers of hired men, we shudder at the following from John's letter of March 10, 1832:

Maria's Brother Daniel is here now, sick with the Consumption. He has had a bad cough for six months. The Doctors say he is a hopeless case. He came here about four weeks ago from Waterford, Erie County, Pa., where he resided nine months previous at the waggon making business until taken with this cough. He has failed considerable since he came here. He is still able to get up and step about. His father is now here, who brought Maria's youngest full sister; she is fourteen years old.

Then from John's letter written six months later on September 3, 1832, we learn:

Maria brought Robert a son on the 13th August; she has not recovered yet from her confinement [but] is getting better slowly. Her Brother Daniel who is here sick with the consumption is now confined

to his bed and is very feeble this day, getting worse, it is thought he will not live a week—he has gave up hopes of ever recovering...he was 23 years of age August last. The Consumption I consider a worse disorder than the Malignant Cholera.

In a letter to William dated January 7, 1833, John noted:

Daniel Lane died the seventh of September betwixt the hours of 12 and 1 o'clock.

The dreaded consumption continued to take its toll. In September 1834, Maria bore her and Robert's third child, a daughter. The following year, on May 27, 1835, John reported to William:

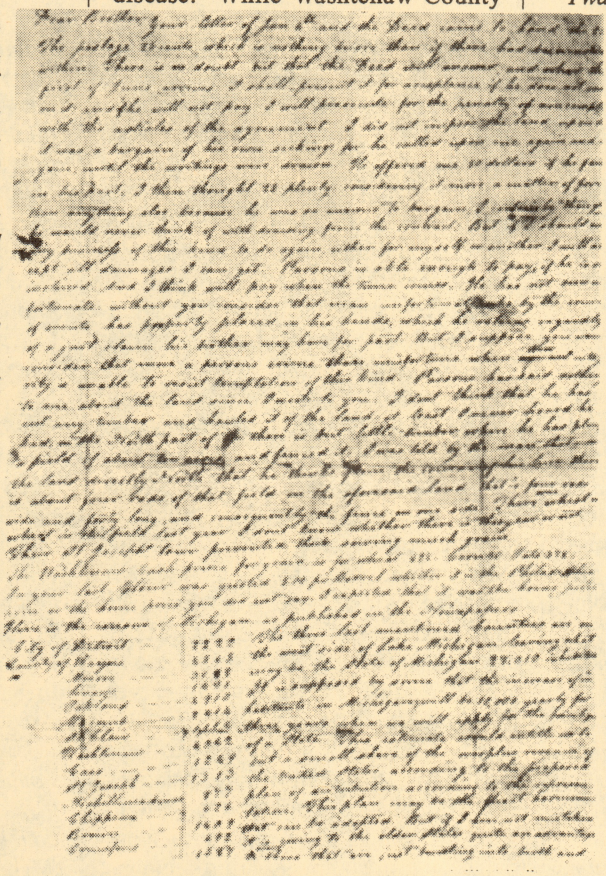
Maria is sick now, something like the Consumption (a bad cough). She was taken at the beginning of April and has been able to do nothing since. She now rides out in a light wagon once a day—is able to sit up some. I fear she will not see another New Year's day. I am sorry too: she is a person I not only respect but highly esteem.

Actually, Maria lived to see two more New Year's days and bore a fourth child, a daughter, in 1836, which died the same year. Mariah died on February 23, 1837, age 32. In a letter dated April 27, 1840, John reported that Mariah's brother, Marcus Lane, an Ypsilanti lawyer, "died of the consumption April 7th, left a widow and two sons."

Although John Geddes may have considered consumption to be a disease worse than cholera, this was not the general view. In his letter of June 28, 1832, in which he first reported the illness of Daniel Lane, John noted also that "the Asiatic Cholera has crossed the Atlantic; it will make business for Doctors." In his letter of September 3, 1832, he noted that, while the disease had spread to Detroit:

We have no cases of Cholera in Washtenaw. When the Cholera made its appearance in Detroit, it carried consternation through the country. The Villages of Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor sent out an armed guard on the leading highways to keep back the people coming from Detroit; and kept up the guard about ten days when the indignation of the people raised to such a pitch as to call a meeting of this Township and the Guard Party was found to be a trifling minority. The Guard was then called in. The Guard party still pretends that they were the means of saving many lifes [sic]. I had nothing to do with it.

Ten days after John wrote this letter, Detroit's best-loved citizen, Father Gabriel Richard, who had spent long days ministering to the victims, died from the disease. While Washtenaw County largely escaped the cholera in 1832, its return in 1834 took one of its leading citizens. John wrote to his bother on September 27, 1834:



Example of a letter. Collection of Russell Bidlack.

The scourge of mankind, the Cholera, made its appearance in Detroit about the middle of July and has carried off in Detroit and vicinity about 400 persons...In Ann Arbor, Anson Brown...died of the Cholera.

After acquiring a large tract of land on the north side of the Huron River, Anson Brown had built a dam across the river along with a gristmill in 1829 and by 1834 he was operating a large store in what came to be called Lower Town. Determined that our future metropolis should be centered there, Brown had used some questionable political tactics in 1832 to acquire the Postmastership for himself. He had then moved the post office to his store, thus causing considerable inconvenience for the residents of Upper Town at a time when it was necessary to visit the post office for one's mail. John Geddes noted this change in his letter to William of March 8, 1834:

I was going to Ann Arbor this afternoon where I intended to mail this. The Post Office of Ann Arbour has been removed...to the new part of the village along the Huron. It was done underhandedly...the new Village is half a mile or more from the old town.

While Anson Brown's death in 1834 meant the return of mail service to Upper Town with Charles Thayer's appointment in Brown's place, we can credit Brown with modernizing the spelling of our town's name. From his time forward, Noah Webster's spelling of the word Arbor has been official with the U.S. Postal Service. John and William, like others, gradually accepted the change in their letter writing.

At the beginning of our postal history, Benjamin Franklin, believing that our Democracy could best survive through a well-informed public, had, as the first Postmaster General, set the cost of mailing newspapers and periodicals very low—in the pennies. The Geddes brothers often sent each other copies of local newspapers, and like many other "law-abiding citizens," thought nothing of writing a few lines of family news therein. For example, this from John's letter of September 3, 1832, writing after his father's death:

I thought from a few lines you forwarded on the Journal of Health that father's time on earth would likely be short."

This practice was contrary to postal rules, of course, and in 1833 Anson Brown and the postmaster in Ypsilanti began charging the price of a letter for a newspaper in which hidden messages were discovered. In a letter of December 28, 1833, John suggested a curious way to thwart the postmasters' application of this rule:

I wish when you send me any newspapers you would draw two strokes with the pen across what you have wrote on them, as the postmaster in Ypsilanti charged me .25 for the last Journal of Health and talked of charging .25 more for the wrapper; on the inside of the wrapper you wrote the conditions of the sale of Father's farm...I told him what I thought... it is the last time he will think of speculating out of me on wrappers.

It is from private letters such as those written by the Geddes brothers that we learn of momentarily important local events that have been long forgotten. For example, note an incident that John reported in his letter to William of March 10, 1832. George Porter was then Michigan's Territorial Governor, with Stevens T. Mason as Secretary. Mason had been only 19-years-of-age when President Jackson appointed him to that office in 1831, suggesting to many Michigan settlers that the President did not view the Territory as deserving of mature men to govern it. Especially galling to men like John Geddes was the fact that, in the absence of Governor Porter from the Territory, which occurred frequently, young Mason served as Acting Governor. Small wonder that he was called "the Boy Governor," even after his election as the State's first Governor in 1837. In a letter of March 10, 1832, John reported:

*Our boy governor met Mr. Corselius, the junior editor of the **Emigrant**, in Detroit a short time since and on inquiring of him if he was the person that wrote a certain article that appeared in the **Emigrant** time since, on acknowledging he did, he (the boy) struck him with his hand in his face, who, not being a man of war, did not return the rude compliment. Mr. Corselius is quite a harmless man, considerably excentric [sic] and quite inoffensive... Judge Dexter, who is the senior editor, was highly provoked and raised his pen, and not satisfied with that, has went to Detroit to see about it.*

John did not provide us with an ending to this story! As John began his letter to William on July 12, 1834, he recalled:

This day ten years ago I landed in Detroit, and then knew not whither to go. Providence directed me to Washtenaw which I hope and think it was for the best. In looking back I can truly say that I rejoice. My prospects then I thought were gloomy.

Actually it had been Jonathan Kearsley, Land Agent at Detroit, who had directed John to Washtenaw, although he probably would not have minded being confused in John's memory with Providence. After describing his financial improvement over the past decade, his annual income from the mill now averaging $400, John now even had money to loan. At age 33, however, he was still pondering his future.

I think of building a house this fall, or doing something that way. I sometimes think of renting the sawmill for a year and go to school and improve my education... its more likely I shall get me a wife in that time. I think it time to attend to it if ever. I am under no engagements of the kind at present. I hold to short courtships.

At the bottom of this letter, in very small script, John added: "I bought a book called 'The Young Man's Own Book' for .75 in Ann Arbor which I think very well of, you had better get one in Harrisburgh."

It was shortly after writing this letter to his brother that William wrote to John telling in considerable detail of his having taken a trip to a Pennsylvania town named Newville, to visit his and John's uncle, Dr. John Geddes and family. A distant cousin, named Eliza McAllen, was then also a visitor in Dr. Geddes' household. William and John had known Eliza earlier, and William noted that "she stands the inroads of time and decay extraordinarily well. She scarce seems to get older, which one could hardly expect from so slender a plant." William also noted, "Cousin Eliza said she was very fond of corresponding with her relatives and requested me to ask you to write to her. She thinks she would have more satisfaction in so doing with a religious relative of which there are but few in the family…"

In John's letter to William of May 27, 1835, we learn that, indeed, he had written to Eliza and that she had responded. There may actually have been several communications between them, renewing, apparently, a close friendship of yesteryear. Missing from the Geddes collection is a letter from John to William written in the summer of 1835 to which William replied the same day he received it, August 9. He was obviously distressed by its contents regarding Eliza:

I cannot recommend her to you for I don't believe she would suit you or any other hard working man, but might some lazy gentleman who had health, time and money to spare and who has withall hypocrite enough to appear religious. I think she would soon learn the Yankee practice of letting her husband pail the cows and you would not be very oddly mated in Michigan, but still I think badly of her. You know she is slender and lady like and could hardly stand the strong embrace of a working man. She is however possessed with good natured sense and more intelligence of any of your Yankee Ladies.

There was a quick response from John: *Your opinion of Eliza McAllen is not sustained by your reasons: Your idea of "embrace" is singular indeed. However favorable my opinion of her is, I don't think she "possesses more intelligence than any of your Yankee Ladies."*

If her health is good, or if she would have an inclination to attend to business, not to work with the perseverance I do, but to see that matters and things were kept in order she might answer. Calculation and Economy are two things I would like to see in a Lady. I have become considerably Yankeefied, and so would you, had you lived as long amongst them as I have...I think some of giving Eliza a call and see for myself and find out whether she has any disposition to do anything or not. But I can't call this year—I have got a house to build.

John closed his letter on August 5, 1835 saying: "I am going to Ann Arbor today. If I should have any news or receive any in the post office, I will notice it." In Ann Arbor, he added the following postscript:

I received a letter today from Eliza who would rather I would call this fall. I would if I could make the arrangements, but I doubt I can.

That he had been smitten is found in the fact that John did find it possible to "make the arrangements." On September 19, 1835, he wrote to William:

Dear Brother: I was preparing to start to Pa. when, on paying my last visit to the post office, which was yesterday, I received quite unexpectedly a letter from Eliza McAllen informing me that she had disposed of herself to a "Mr. Robert Strain, a gentleman whom I have had a great regard for, for two years, but which I never expected to court me, esteeming him highly, admiring him highly, admiring him and considering him a good offer. I felt no reluctance in giving him my heart and hand. I expect if nothing unforeseen occurs that we will be married in about five weeks and start immediately

for Springfield, Ohio, which will be our place of residence for some time. He is pious, intelligent, handsome, and has fine manners, he is 34 years. He is a widower, has one son."

Following this long quotation from Eliza's letter, John wrote simply: *"Consequently I shall defer going to Pa. for the present."* Later in his letter he added:

My losing Eliza, you probably think is not a lamentable circumstance for me. I have not and don't intend to take offence at her. She was much more willing to get married than I was. And I was willing she should do better if opportunity offered. For you were all opposed to the match and I did not think myself it would be suitable.

In John's letters written during the eighteen months following his loss of Eliza, he revealed little about his personal life. When William wrote to him on May 1, 1837, he noted having received a letter from John dated the previous April 15th. This letter, however, is missing. It was doubtless in this letter that John reported Mariah's death on the previous February 15th, and he probably explained how Robert's three motherless children were now being cared for; Jane, the eldest was six; Robert L, as he was always called, was four; and Mariah, named for her mother, was only two. We also regret the absence of this letter of April 15, because a week earlier, on April 7th, John had been married, an event in his life that he surely described therein. We know only that his bride's name was Frances Eliza Savage, her nickname being Fanny, and that she had been born on February 19, 1806, in Orange, New York. We wonder whether Fanny may have been employed by Robert as housekeeper and nurse for his children, a role that she now played as John's wife.

With marriage, John now gave serious attention to building the house that he had talked of building for some years. The site he chose was some 300 feet south of Robert's house, on the tract that John and Robert had owned jointly since 1829. On July 4, 1837, John reported to William that "the chimney of my house I have got built." He noted that two bricklayers had spent seven days, each charging $2.00 per day. Bricks numbering 5,000 had been used, with an oven included in the chimney. John noted, also, that he had completed sawing the necessary poplar lumber, and "I am going to have a kiln *built to dry the lumber... I think of leaving* this [Robert's] house in October." In a letter dated October 12, 1837, John reported: "I have dug a well 27 feet deep; 4 feet of water."

Not surprising, John's move was delayed until December; Robert's children accompanied him and Fanny to the new house, a further reason to think that Fanny may have been their nursemaid before marrying John. John wrote on January 5, 1838:

We have moved into the new house on 21st December. It is finished with the exception of painting. I have not counted up yet what it cost me... We have built [also] a small house for the miller, and it was occupied from the 4th of this month.

In a letter to William dated April 13, 1838, John noted: *"My wife brought me a son on the 19th of January. We call him Henry for his mother's father. I would have called him Robert but I thought we had Roberts enough for the present."* Little Henry died, however, on July 4, 1841.

In 1843, when William Geddes was contemplating moving from Pennsylvania to Michigan to farm the land that John had purchased on his behalf in 1827, he enquired about house building. John wrote on March 11, 1843:

The cost of building a house here is owing to the kind of house. When we came here, houses were built and roofed for $40.00; $100 built what was called a decent house. These were log houses. The first kind round logs; the second kind were round logs hewed inside and story and quarter high. My house is two stories, 24 by 32 feet; cellar under half of it. It is a frame house. I kept a particular account of the cost, and it amounted to $754.77. ... Your land is further from a sawmill and stones are not to be had very near. These things would probably add 20 pr. cent more to the cost of a house on your land.

Early in the 1830s there were predictions that a railroad would one day be built across Michigan. In his letter of September 27, 1834, John reported that, *"by an order from the War Department an engineer was sent to Michigan to examine a route for a contemplated railroad from Detroit to the mouth of the St. Joseph. He commenced his examination about the first of September last at Detroit."*

Committees were soon formed on behalf of various localities to influence the engineer and his successors in this decision making. *"The Ypsilanti folks were very unwilling he should go to Ann Arbor,"* according to John, promoting instead a route five or six miles to the north of the county seat. *"The Huron is the backbone of Washtenaw," John argued, "and [we] are in hopes that in a few years, say four or five, we will see steam cars flying past us."*

The matter continued to be debated, and, as John noted in his letter of August 18, 1836, "Robert and I have subscribed $1,000 each Rail Road stock, on condition that they locate the railroad along this side of the River Huron." Then came the national depression called the Panic of 1837, banks failed and prices fell, and the state's entire program for internal improvements slowed dramatically, but did not die.

It had still not been determined on which side of the Huron between Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor the tracks would be laid, but in his letter to William dated January 5, 1838, John happily reported:

The Rail-Road is finally established. It is laid through our Mill-yard about where we wanted it. It is to be made on the level of the ground (and is on a level for two miles).

On April 13, 1838, John further reported:

We have agreed to get about 100,000 feet for the Rail Road at $10 pr. thousand. If it had not been for the making of the Rail Road this summer, lumber would have been dull... The Rail-Road cars from Detroit to Ypsilanti make a trip back and forth every day, Sundays not excepted. The fare is $1.50 for a passenger for 30 miles. I think one dollar is plenty. I took one ride to Detroit and back to Ypsilanti the beginning of February. I went free. Ypsilanti and vicinity was offered a ride and I was one amongst many. We were two hours going to Detroit—a few minutes more returning. It is a fine way of going. The Rail Road cost $12,000 per mile from Ypsilanti to Detroit. It is said it collects $1,000 per week.

While having a keen interest in politics even in his youth, it was in Michigan that John Geddes became a passionate partisan. We have noted his early embrace of the Anti-Masonic Party, but as that cause soon died, John turned to the Whigs, claiming that the very word Democrat equated that of Devil. It was as a Whig that John was elected Supervisor of Ann Arbor Township in 1839. Always in attendance at Whig rallies and at the polls on election day, John described for

William the election of November 1837:

Our election was vigorously contested. Those that were tardy about turning out to vote were waited upon, or sent for & hauled to the polls in wagons: each party had flags waving in the wagons and men stood at the polls and charged all unknown and doubtful votes.

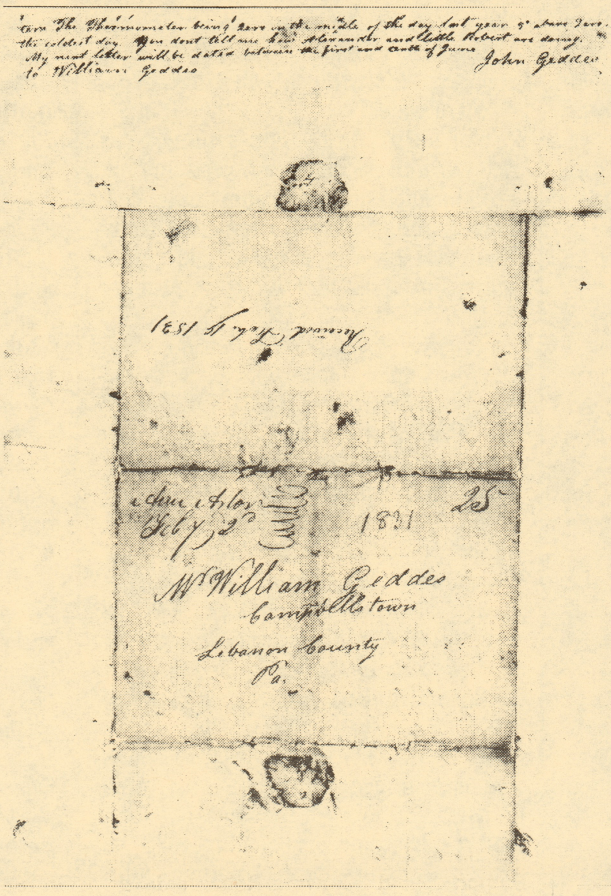
In the autumn 1840 election, John was elected a member of the Michigan House of Representatives in Detroit. He took his seat on January 4, 1841, amid an uproar over the missing ballots from Hamtramck Township in Wayne County, wherein the Whigs were certain there were votes giving them a clear majority. John explained the problem to William in a letter dated January 7, 1841:

The Representatives box in the township of Hamtramck disappeared mysteriously before the votes were counted. The night after the election the [three] ballot boxes were put into a large box, and that large box was placed on a cart to which a horse was hitched and driven towards Detroit... [The Representatives box] was found on the road broken open and the ballots scattered about... All that those who had these boxes in charge could say was that they were drunk.

John was surprised at the privileges afforded to Representatives, explaining to his brother that the state paid the postage on all letters addressed to them if they were identified as Representatives in the address. He also listed the items provided on each member's desk:

We are furnished stationery when here, that is, paper, a penknive which cost $2.50, a box of quills, two inkstands, a sand box, a wafer box, a small ivory ruler, two pieces of red tape, and as many wafers as we can use, as much paper as we can use, and the amount of two daily papers.

Later John complained that *"not a few of the members carry off paper, steel pens, ink, etc. [and] lay in their summer supply, although the worst offenders in this regard were the Democrats, or Tories, as he usually called them.* Because the Whigs controlled the House by only one vote, there was so much wrangling that the 1841 session lasted 100 days. Their per diem was $3.00 and Mr. Ewers charged him only $2.00 per week for his room and board, while some of his colleagues were having to pay as much as $5.00 per week.



Example of an envelope, 1831. Collection of Russell Bidlack.

It was while John Geddes was serving as a Representative in the Michigan Legislature in 1841 that word came of the death of President Harrison, just one month following his inauguration. John wrote of this to his brother on April 10, 1841:

News came this day that Gen. Harrison died April 4th, which is gloomy intelligence for the week.

Adding to the same letter three days later, he wrote:

The Legislature passed a resolution to wear crape on the left arm for thirty days to the memory of Gen. Harrison, and so the Committee on Supplies presented each member with a piece of crape.

For the first time in its history, Ann Arbor played host, for a brief time in 1842, to a former President of the United States. Writing to his brother on July 11, 1842, John related his attending the event, even though the visitor was a Democrat.

Martin Van Buren, Ex-President of the United States of America was in Ann Arbor today (July 11th); came there one quarter before eleven and left one quarter before three. I have been up to see him. He is not an extraordinary man. They paraded round some and halted before the Courthouse where Ex-Lieutenant Gov. Mundy addressed him five or six minutes. Van replied in a short address of two minutes, spoke low, then the ex-president went to the tavern where him and his friends were to dine. Quite a number of people were to see him as he passed along; probably half of them Whigs. I had two or three short but sharp debates on politics, and then started for home about half past twelve. As I was walking home all alone, I thought I must endeavor to avoid these needless and foolish debates as they do me no good and only aggravate, instead of convince. [But] I think his policy is injurious to the country and himself no better than a leader of bandits and robbers...

Throughout the two decades of correspondence in this Geddes collection, there are brief references to events of the time that leave the reader wishing for more detail. For example, in a letter that John began on March 6, 1843, he reported that *"Robert is going [to] thresh with a machine this week one day and pay the hands that assist him in straw."* Before sealing this letter, John added: *"Robert threshed 300 bu. of wheat March 8th, eight horses and fifteen men were employed. He has 300 more which he intends to thresh next Monday."* To an Iowa farm boy, March seems an odd time of year to be threshing wheat.

In a letter dated May 24, 1844, John made casual mention that his neighbor, Botsford, *"is going to Detroit next Monday on his way to Ohio to buy 500 sheep on his farm. He has 2 or 300 now."* *In a day before rail or motor transport, how would one herd 500 sheep from Ohio to Michigan?*

Throughout the Geddes brothers' correspondence, both John and William envisioned a time when William would join his brothers and sister in Michigan. Until their father died in 1832, however, William felt obliged to remain on the farm. Then, having been named executor of his father's estate, William found

himself so entangled in lawsuits of his father's making that he was compelled to remain, determined to provide some inheritance for himself and his siblings.

Then in 1835, William was married to Jane McBay of Palmyra, a small town in Lebanon County to which he then moved to live with Jane and her mother. In due course, Jane bore a son, followed by two daughters. It was not until the autumn of 1844 that William, with wife, mother-in-law, and three children, made the long anticipated journey to Washtenaw County to begin farming the land in Pittsfield Township that he had owned since 1837. His last letter to John was written in Franklin County, Pennsylvania, to tell him that they were on their way west.

John's last letter to William, dated September 14, 1844, was penned in the midst of Henry Clay's campaign for the Presidency as a Whig. As in most of John's letters, space was devoted to politics. Knowing that the day would come when John would join the Republican Party, and that he would permit his house, altered to include a hidden second cellar below some loose floor boards in his sitting room, to become a station on the Underground Railroad, we may marvel at his earlier view of Abolitionism in 1844 as he argued on behalf of Clay:

The Abolitionists, the most of them, are as inexorable as Achilles when his maid, his black eyed maid, was forced away. They can see nothing but dueling and slaveholding in Henry Clay, so huge are these things, and so contracted in their visions. They call themselves conscientious lovers of Freedom, and I call them fools.

It was also in this last letter to William preserved in the Geddes Collection that we find John's last contemporary reference to his sawmill:

We have had the Sawmill wheel overhauled and we put one in on the reaction principal. It is called the Stanton Wheel. It has been running two weeks. I can saw more with it than Flutter wheel and it takes a little less water.

With the arrival of William Geddes in Washtenaw County, there was no further need for him and John to correspond. There are, however, several extant letters written by John to family members during his old age, and from these and other sources of the period, we can complete his story. As noted earlier, John and Fanny's first son, Henry, died at the age of three, but there followed another son, named for his father, and two daughters Sarah and Rachel. John, Jr. had no children and died in 1878, and of the two daughters, only Sarah, who was married to William T. Randall, a paper manufacturer of Racine, Wisconsin, provided John with grandchildren, including Charlotte Randall who collected and preserved the family papers, including her grandfather's and granduncle's letters. Following the death of Fanny in 1855, John married her sister, Julia Ette Savage, but they had no children. Julia Ette lived until 1883.

Although it had been Robert Geddes who, in 1825, had purchased from the U.S. Government the land described as the south fractional part of the northwest quarter of section 36 on which both he and John built their homes, he had sold an undivided half of it to John in 1829 for $150.00, including the mill and mill yard. In 1847, for $400.00, John purchased Robert's half of the "Saw Mill Property," and following Robert's death in 1866, John bought from his brother's heirs the remaining half interest of the original property for $1,000. Earlier, the brothers had sold a slice of the land along the river to the Michigan Central Railroad on which to lay its tracks, as well as several lots to individuals, thus reducing the farm to 67 acres. In 1868, John "retired" from the sawmill business, selling the remainder of the "Saw Mill Property" to the Michigan Central. When the 1870 census was taken, his occupation was recorded as 'farmer.'

For many years, John served as a Justice of the Peace in Ann Arbor Township while hired laborers did most of the farm work. One of those laborers was an immigrant from Ireland named Francis Monaghan for whom John developed a high regard. On December 23, 1885, now a widower for a second time and 84-years-old, John sold his farm to Monaghan for $4,000 with $1,100 "down" and a mortgage to John for $2,900.

Moving from his 1837 home, John now found room and board in the home of Hannah Geddes, widow of Robert L. Geddes, who had died in 1881. Robert L., as he was always called, was a son of John's elder brother, but Robert L. had been more like a son to John than a nephew. Following his father's second marriage, Robert L. had lived with and been educated by his Uncle John. In a way, he took the place of John's son, Henry, who had died in 1841. John was quite contented living with Hannah, observing in a letter to his daughter Sarah in 1887: "I don't think I could find a better place."

Hannah Geddes lived in Superior Township, however, but John kept Ann Arbor Township as his official residence, as shown in this same last letter found in the Geddes Collection dated May 19, 1887. He explained to his daughter:

On the 24th of March I went to the Robert Geddes house to board so that I could vote again in Ann Arbor Township [this Robert Geddes was the eldest son of John's son William, who had died May 21, 1877]. Hannah agreed to take me to the polls the first Monday of April [1887] a cold, windy day. Hannah got along a little after ten and we started, 40 degrees cold. We got to the polls with not being froze out. I stood it better than Hannah. I voted and then Hannah took me to Mr. Lyon's. She went down town and came back at three o'clock. We stood going home better, though it was 32 degrees when we got back to Hannah's.

It was in a horse drawn buggy, of course, that Hannah took John to vote, a duty that even at age 86 he still

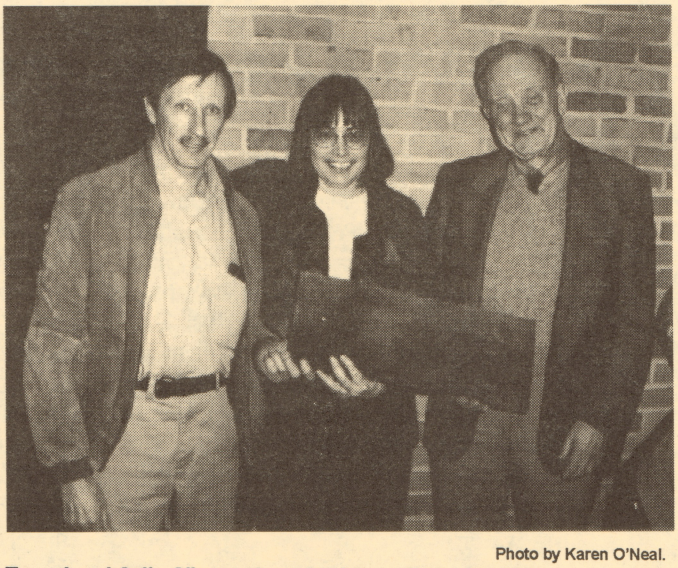


Photo by Karen O'Neal.

Tapani and Sally Silvennoinen (and Russ Bidlack) holding a piece of lumber from the John Geddes house which they live in today.

considered to be of prime importance.

We know from an extant letter from Sarah to her father dated January 23, 1887, that John had been seriously ill that month, and in his letter to Sarah the following May 19th he reported on his health.

My strength comes very slow. I think I am still gaining. I called on Dr. Owen about my left leg after it began swelling; after four calls I told him I would doctor myself, and began on Dr. Donald Kennedy's New Discovery. The first bottle did not seem to do much, but the second bottle reduced the swelling considerable. I am nearly through with the third bottle. I think when I get it through I will stop and call my leg well. So much for Doctors.

Dr. Post's bill was 13 dollars. I paid it but I think if I had sued him for malpractice I would have treated him as he deserved. I still take Phosfate [sic] a teaspoon every morning. I have no pain and can walk very well a short distance.

John Geddes died on November 4, 1889, at the age of 88. A lengthy obituary appeared in the Ann Arbor Register three days later. It is from this that we learn:

On Monday morning, Hon. John Geddes, one of the very oldest pioneer settlers of Ann Arbor and of Washtenaw County, passed from his long labors on this earth to enjoy a well-earned rest "beyond the River." Mr. Geddes had... enjoyed remarkable health until about a year ago, at which time he came... to this city, to the residence of C. C. Church on Seventh St. where he died...

"Uncle John" was a remarkable man in many ways, and will be missed greatly. His physical and mental faculties were wonderful, and his honesty and uprightness were proverbial... He was peculiar in his business transactions and would never take a penny not his due... he used his hat for a bank and always carried large sums of money under the band... The funeral services were held at the Presbyterian Church yesterday afternoon at two o'clock, the remains being placed in Geddes cemetery to which place they were followed by a large number of friends.

The Geddes Cemetery, where John shares a tall tombstone with his brother, Robert, now called the Botsford Cemetery, is located on Earhart Road in Ann Arbor Township.

Around The County

The Saline Area Historical Society is mounting a series of lectures on **Orange Risdon**, the founder of Saline. The second talk in the series (given by **Rick Kuss**) will be held **Wednesday, March 21** at 7:30 PM at the Depot and will focus on Risdon's activities in Michigan and his move to the West. The first lecture (which your editor attended) concentrated on Risdon's birth in Vermont and the social and economic conditions of the time period (1820s). A **Founders Day Dinner** will be held **Wednesday, April 25th** at Weller's. This is the date Risdon received his patent for the purchase of property in Saline and is also the **125th anniversary of his death.** Reservations for the dinner at $20/plate are being accepted by President Wayne Clements, (734) 429-9621. Founders Week will conclude with activities at the Depot on **Saturday, April 28th** from 11-3 PM. Regular monthly talks are free and open to the public. Light refreshments are served and everyone is welcome. A new phone line at the Depot can provide updates on events. **Call (734) 944-0442.**

The **Waterloo Farm Museum in Stockbridge** has just released its schedule for this year. On **Sunday May 20**, they will hold their **Annual Meeting** at 2 PM and the **Farm Museum will open** to the general public on **Wednesday, June 13th until Labor Day, September 2.** Special tours can be arranged for groups on the weekends of **June 2-3** and **June 9-10**. Their Annual **Log Cabin Day,** with its educational component, will be held **Sunday, June 24th** and the **Quilt Show and Civil War Encampment** will be **Saturday, July 28th** and **Sunday July 29th.** Though the Farm closes **Monday, September 3**, it re-opens for Pioneer Day on **Sunday, October 14th** and Victorian Christmas on the **weekend of December 1-2**. Note the **Dewey School Museum** is open during special events in the summer by **appointment only.** These tours begin **Tuesday, May 1**. Call President Andrea Stickney at (517) 851-4084 for more information and directions. Or visit their website at **http://scs.k12.mi.us/~waterloo.**

The Genealogical Society of Washtenaw County has announced its future programs. On **Sunday, March 25th Bobbie Snow** will discuss "*Effective Use of the Internet.*" **Michael Clinansmith** will present the class "*Planning Family Reunions.*" On **Sunday, April 22nd, Sharon Brevoort** will discuss "*Pre-Revolutionary Research in New York and New Amsterdam.*" **Marcia McCrary** will do the class on *"Gone but Not Forgotten: A look at different kinds of death records."* On **Sunday, May 20th, Jasper Pennington** will discuss "Researching Church Records" while the class will be on the topic, "*There are no Dumb Questions in Genealogy #4.*" All meetings start at 1:30 and take place at the St. Joseph Mercy Hospital Education Building, 5301 E. Huron River Drive. Use parking lot P. Call (734) 483-2799 for more information.

The **Dexter Area Historical Society** is actively seeking funds to purchase Gordon Hall and its site of 70 acres from the University of Michigan. If you'd like to contribute, send a donation to them at 3443 Inverness St., Dexter, MI 48130. Mark the envelope "**Save Gordon Hall." All donations are tax-deductible.**

The Lenawee Historical Society has just published a history of **Blissfield** by **Charles Lindquist.** Entitled, "**Spanning the Years,**" the history covers 1824-1999 and costs $17.50 plus $2.50 for mailing. Buy a copy from them through the mail by sending your check to: PO Box 511, Adrian, MI 49221.

Condolences

We are sad to report the death of the **Demaris Cash,** the owner of the Treasure Mart and a great supporter of the WCHS. She died February 11, 2001 at the age of 95. We have also just learned that long-time supporter **Anna Doris Bach** of Kalamazoo died January 18th. Miss Bach donated money for our Museum Shop and it is named in her honor. She was a descendant of the Botsford and Bach families that have given the Society many things for our collections over the years. We extend our condolences to their families.

Around The Town

Cobblestone Farm is thinking spring! On **Sunday, April 29th**, they will have a **Celebration of Spring,** and their lambs and goats will be around to help. They will also be preparing the garden for spring planting. You can also view **the new authentic picket fence** built by Augusta Township's Dalton Webster. It has 1000 pickets and runs across the front of the property. A split rail fence, built last fall, also enhances the double row of black walnut trees on the east edge of the property. The **Family Dance Series continues on Sunday, March 18th.** Call Ed Rice at (734) 994-2928 for details. The farm is at 2781 Packard Road and is operated by the City of Ann Arbor Parks Department as an authentic 1840s farmstead. A small donation is usually requested for non-members.

The **Kempf House** once again will be hosting its **Wednesday Noon Lecture Series** beginning **March 7th**. They will continue every Wednesday through May 16th. Lectures are on historical topics of interest and go from Noon-1 PM. Bring your lunch and pay $2.00 ($1.00 for members). A schedule of the talks can be obtained by calling (734) 994-4898.

The **Ann Arbor District Library** has a wonderful exhibit entitled, "**The Great Experiment: George Washington and the American Republic.**" The exhibit will be up from **Thursday, March 8-Thursday, April 19th** in the multi-purpose room. Related events include storyteller **Elizabeth James** on **Saturday, March 17th**; a slide lecture by **Arlene Shy** of the Clements Library on **GW: Man and Monument** on **Tuesday, March 20th**; a talk by **Richard Brookhiser,** on **Rediscovering Washington** on **Tuesday, March 27th**; and a program on "**Tracing your Revolutionary Roots**" by the **Genealogical Society of Washtenaw** on **Saturday, March 24th** 1-3 PM. Call **(734) 327-4560** or visit **www.aadl.org.**

In conjunction with this library exhibit are exhibits at the **Clements Library** (734) 764-2347 and three programs at the **Matthaei Botanical Gardens** (734) 998.7061. The gardens will host tours **every Sunday in March and April** (*except* Easter, April 15th) on plants cultivated at Mount Vernon. In addition, on **Sundays, March 4 and April l,** go on **Washington Trail Tours** and discover plants and trees that grew at **Mount Vernon.** On **Saturday, March 25th** from Noon-4 PM there will be a **revolutionary tea**—an open house with tours and colonial presentations. Coffee and gingerbread will be served.

The next lecture at the **Detroit Observatory** will be by **David Strauss,** professor of History at Kalamazoo College. He will be speaking on **Percival Lowell and the Canals of Mars** at 7 PM on **Tuesday, March 13th.** There will also be Open House tours on **Thursday, March 22** from Noon-2 PM and **Wednesday, April 11** from 3-5 PM. A $5.00 donation is suggested for the tours. Call Karen Woollams at (734) 763-2230 or visit **www.DetroitObservatory.umich.edu.**

Future Programs

We have a wonderful selection of topics this winter and encourage you to attend. All meetings are held at 2 PM and light refreshments are served following the talk. Postcard reminders are mailed ***two weeks prior*** to the meetings. Some members tell us that their card is delivered ***after*** the event. If you supply our mailing crew with First Class Postage, they will be pleased to expedite your postcard.

Sunday • March 18th

Peggy Haines, Washtenaw County Clerk and Register of Deeds (and WCHS Board Member!) will tell us about the election process and give **a tour of the new County Annex** Building at Ann and Main (200 N. Main St.).

Sunday • April 22nd

Note change of date due to Easter

The **U-M Observatory** will host a tour for us and Director **Dr. Patricia Whitesell** will speak on "*The History of the U-M's Detroit Observatory.*" ***PLEASE NOTE THAT RESERVATIONS WILL BE REQUIRED SINCE ONLY 40 CAN BE ACCOMMODATED.*** *Phone (734) 763-2230 or e-mail* ***DetroitObservatory @umich.edu*** *by Friday, April 20th.*

Wednesday • May 16th

Our **Annual Meeting** will be a potluck held at **Webster Church** at 6 PM in Webster Township. Our speaker will be **Willah Weddon** of Stockbridge. A former journalist with the *Ypsilanti Press, Jackson Citizen Patriot, Lansing State Journal* and *Detroit Free Press,* she was a member of the Capitol Press Corps in Lansing and wrote about the First Ladies of Michigan. She has published four books on the First Families of Michigan and has won many awards for her publications.

Saturday • June 2nd

Our **Annual Bus Tour** will visit **Cranbrook including Saarinen House** and the art museum. The cost would be approximately $60-65.00. This will cover the bus, the tour and a lunch. Details will be in later *Impressions.*

Loan Boxes Help Prisoners

Education Chair, **Sally Silvennoinen,** reports that she shared the Educational Exhibit boxes with the men at the **Federal Prison at Milan** just before Thanksgiving. They were very thankful to have visitors and they enjoyed the artifacts and history of Michigan. The artifacts used for warmth in the winter or light created a lot of discussion ("Life before Electricity" box) with those men from Jamaica, Florida, and the southern regions of the U.S. One gentleman wrote: "I think that people like you help those of us that are incarcerated to believe that they didn't throw the key away when they locked us up."

If you know an organization that would like to use these boxes, call the museum at (734) 662-9092.

Knapps Points Still Accepted

We are still collecting Knapps' Points to acquire more acid-free storage boxes for our collections. **Esther Warzynski** is thankful to all of you who have sent them to her in the past. Her address is 1520 Martha Ave, Ann Arbor, MI 48103 for those of you who wish to send more. And we are thankful to Esther for continuing to collect and count the slips for us!

A Year Of Exhibits Planned!

Our newest board member, **Scott Jacob,** is planning **three (!) new exhibits** for the rest of the year. Along with Collections Chair, Judy Chrisman, and board member, Karen O'Neal, plans are underway to open our next exhibit the weekend of **March 3-4**. Entitled **"Ladies at Home,"** this exhibit will focus on the activities of women when most women remained in the home. This will include dressmaking, gardening, cooking, and club activities. This exhibit will run until **Friday, June 15th.**

Our second exhibit will begin **Monday June 18th** and will be up **until Friday, October 19th.** The theme will be "**Delivery Days**" and will be about things we used to get delivered to our homes—ice, milk, eggs, butter, laundry, etc. Our third exhibit will be on "**Commercial Christmas"** and will be up from **Saturday, November 3rd** until Christmas.

Scott also received eight torso manikins donated by Janice Cecil of Jacobson's stores. This is what new blood can accomplish! Thank you Scott!

All exhibits will be open to the public on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays from Noon-4 PM and by appointment. Call (734) 668-7470 or (734) 662-9092. We have been collecting items relating to county history for almost 150 years and now we are finally exhibiting them. **We are in need of docents, so please contact us at (734) 662-9092 if you'd like to be a guide for an afternoon.**

Detroit Is 300!

The **Michigan Historical Preservation Network** is holding its Annual Conference in Detroit this year from **Thursday, April 26th-Saturday, April 28th.** Learn what's happening in Detroit and in southeastern Michigan. The **Construction Trades Council** will give hands-on experience in masonry terra cotta and decorative finish restoration as well as show how to assess water damage (very useful after this winter!). On Friday and Saturday, three concurrent tracks will explore commercial, maritime and neighborhood preservation activities. Participants can go on tours, learn about new designation programs and hear about preservation success stories. Keynote speakers are **Jonathan Sandvick,** an architect and Vice President of the Cleveland Historic Warehouse District, and **Roberta Brandes Gratz,** an award winning journalist and urban critic, who has written extensively on downtown revitalization. Tours will include a Detroit River Boat Tour and bus tours of downtown Detroit and historic neighborhoods. Registration is required. For a brochure and more information call (248) 625-8181 or e-mail **mhpn@voyager.net**.

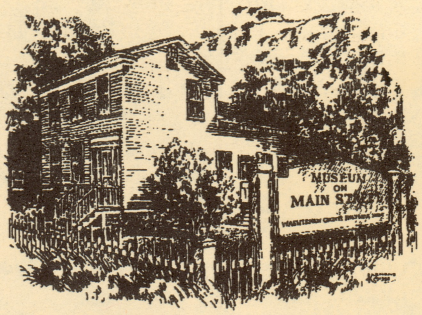
The **Detroit Historical Museum** offers many tours throughout the year. For information and reservations call (313)-833-0242. The Museum is open Tuesday-Friday, 9:30 AM-5 PM and Saturday and Sunday 10 AM-5 PM.

Business Support

This month's issue of *Impressions* is co-sponsored by

EDWARDS BROTHERS

OPEN HOUSES
Sat. March 17 & 24
All Invited



WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Post Office Box 3336
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106-3336

TOUR THE NEW COUNTY ANNEX BUILDING

SPEAKER
PEGGY HAINES, COUNTY CLERK

SUNDAY • 2 PM
MARCH 18TH, 2001

200 N. MAIN STEET
ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

More info on Internet
JOHN GEDDES
http://members.tripod.com/~deemamafred/gedind.html

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Ann Arbor, MI
Permit No. 96

MEMBER 2001
NANCY KROHN
905 ROBIN RD
ANN ARBOR MI 48103-3008